

110TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. RES. 540

Recognizing the historical significance of the sloop-of-war USS Constellation as a reminder of the participation of the United States in the transatlantic slave trade and of the efforts of the United States to end the slave trade.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 29, 2008

Ms. MIKULSKI (for herself and Mr. CARDIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

SEPTEMBER 18 (legislative day, SEPTEMBER 17), 2008

Reported by Mr. LEAHY, without amendment

SEPTEMBER 23 (legislative day, SEPTEMBER 17), 2008

Considered and agreed to

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# RESOLUTION

Recognizing the historical significance of the sloop-of-war USS Constellation as a reminder of the participation of the United States in the transatlantic slave trade and of the efforts of the United States to end the slave trade.

Whereas, on September 17, 1787, the Constitution of the United States was adopted, and article I, section 9 declared that Congress could prohibit the importation of slaves into the United States in the year 1808;

Whereas, in 1794, the United States Congress passed “An Act to prohibit the carrying on the Slave Trade from the United States to any foreign place or country”, approved March 22, 1794 (1 Stat. 347), thus beginning the efforts of the United States to halt the slave trade;

Whereas, on May 10, 1800, Congress enacted a law that outlawed all participation by people in the United States in the international trafficking of slaves and authorized the United States Navy to seize vessels flying the flag of the United States engaged in the slave trade;

Whereas, on March 2, 1807, President Thomas Jefferson signed into law “An Act to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, from and after the first of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight” (2 Stat. 426);

Whereas, on January 1, 1808, the prohibition on the importation of slaves into the United States took effect;

Whereas, on March 3, 1819, Congress authorized the Navy to cruise the coast of Africa to suppress the slave trade, declaring that Africans on captured ships be placed under Federal jurisdiction and authorizing the President to appoint an agent in Africa to facilitate the return of captured Africans to the continent;

Whereas, in 1819, the Royal Navy of Great Britain established the West Coast of Africa as a separate naval station and actively plied the waters in pursuit of slave ships, and Great Britain negotiated with many other countries to obtain the right to search vessels suspected of engaging in the slave trade;

Whereas, on May 15, 1820, Congress declared the trading of slaves to be an act of piracy and that those convicted of trading slaves were subject to the death penalty;

Whereas the Webster-Ashburton Treaty between Great Britain and the United States, signed August 9, 1842, provided that both countries would maintain separate naval squadrons on the coast of Africa to enforce their respective laws against the slave trade;

Whereas, in 1843, the newly formed United States African Squadron sailed for Africa and remained in operation until the Civil War erupted in 1861;

Whereas, in 1859, the USS Constellation, the last all-sail vessel designed and built by the United States Navy, sailed to West Africa as the flagship of the United States African Squadron, which consisted of 8 ships, including 4 steam-powered vessels suitable for chasing down and capturing slave ships;

Whereas, on December 21, 1859, the USS Constellation captured the brig Delicia after a 10-hour chase, and although the Delicia had no human cargo on board upon capture, the crew had been preparing the ship to take on slaves;

Whereas, on the night of September 25, 1860, the USS Constellation spotted the barque Cora near the mouth of the Congo River and, after a dramatic moonlit chase, captured the slave ship with 705 Africans crammed into her permanent “slave deck”;

Whereas after capturing the Cora, a detachment of the Constellation’s crew sailed the surviving Africans to Monrovia, Liberia, a colony founded for the settlement of free African-Americans, which became the destination for all

Africans freed on slave ships captured by the United States Navy;

Whereas, on May 21, 1861, the USS Constellation captured the brig Triton, and although the Triton did not have Africans captured for slavery on board when intercepted by the Constellation, a search confirmed that the ship had been prepared to take on slaves;

Whereas the Triton, registered in Charleston, South Carolina, was one of the first Union naval captures of the Civil War;

Whereas, from 1859 to 1861, the USS Constellation and the United States African Squadron captured 14 slave ships and liberated nearly 4,000 Africans destined for a life of servitude in the Americas, a record unsurpassed by the squadron under previous commanders; and

Whereas, on September 25, 2008, the USS Constellation Museum will hold a ceremony to commemorate the bicentennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade aboard the same ship that, 148 years before, forced the capitulation of the slave ship Cora and freed the 705 Africans confined within: Now, therefore, be it

1       *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2           (1) recognizes the historical and educational  
3       significance of the USS Constellation, a 153-year-old  
4       warship berthed in Baltimore, Maryland, as a re-  
5       minder of both the participation of the United  
6       States in the slave trade and the efforts of the  
7       United States Government to suppress the inhumane  
8       practice;

1           (2) applauds the preservation of the historic  
2 vessel and the efforts of the USS Constellation Mu-  
3 seum to engage people from all over the world with  
4 this vital part of our history; and

5           (3) supports the USS Constellation as an ap-  
6 propriate site for the Nation to commemorate the bi-  
7 centennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave  
8 trade in 2008.

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